

**United Way of North Central
Massachusetts**

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December 7, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

United Way of North Central Massachusetts appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In our 23 communities in northern Worcester County our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in 211, Supplemental Basic Needs and Early Childhood Literacy.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Our organization has a nineteen year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with nearly 150 businesses, over 100 nonprofit agencies, 10 school districts, 23 cities and municipalities, a prominent community college and 1 state university and over 10 local and state government officials to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Northern Worcester County as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. After the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, statewide United Ways collaborated to support the statewide services. In the last 10 years our agency, has invested over \$92,000 to the success of 211 and answer upward of 103,000 requests for help each year in our service area. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$680,000 in mental health, substance use, health, education, and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive

calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at www.uwnm.org and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 978-345-1577. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip M. Grzewinski', written over the printed name.

Philip M. Grzewinski
CEO & President